

# PHOTOGRAPHY

## FAQ

**Q** I've heard that the new Canon EOS 450D has something called Live View. What is it?

**A** Live View simply means that the camera can show a preview image on its LCD screen. This is a standard feature on fixed-lens digital cameras, but is less common on SLR cameras. The light entering an SLR camera's lens is directed either to the optical viewfinder or – with a quick flip of an internal mirror – to the camera's sensor, but it can't go to both at the same time. This means you can't have an optical viewfinder preview at the same time as an LCD preview, so most digital SLRs don't bother with an LCD preview mode at all. However, Canon's 450D, all current Olympus digital SLRs and various other new models include an LCD preview option. This can help when shooting at awkward angles or adjusting the exposure and white balance.

**Ben Pitt**

Music and photography expert

ben@computershopper.co.uk

## CANON PowerShot A720 IS

★★★★★

£125 inc VAT

From [www.camerabox.co.uk](http://www.camerabox.co.uk)



Mid-range PowerShot cameras have been consistently picking up Best Buy awards in recent months. Canon's winning formula is so obvious that we're baffled as to why few other manufacturers have tried it: full photographic control, dependable image quality, fast performance, plus modest specifications, a plastic body and AA batteries to keep the price down. The A720 IS also has a 6x zoom lens, giving it a clear advantage over our previous favourite, the A570 IS, which has a 4x zoom.

The design is bulkier than most compact cameras, and weighs almost twice as much. However, the protruding handgrip makes it easier to hold the camera steady, and it's still small enough to keep in a handbag or coat pocket. The 2½in screen has a disappointing 115,000-pixel resolution, but there's an optical viewfinder for when you need to see more detail.

It's the photographic options that separate this camera from most other sub-£200 models. There's full control over the aperture, shutter speed, ISO speed and focus, plus excellent onscreen feedback to help you choose the best settings. The controls that provide access to these features could be better labelled but it doesn't take long to get used to them and in general use the camera is friendly and responsive.

The only exceptions to this were the regular requests to reset the date, and delays of around five seconds between shots when using the flash – an inevitable downside of using AA batteries. The upside is that a pair of 2,700mAh NiMH batteries kept the A720 going for 518 shots in our test, which is much more than most lithium ion batteries can manage.



The A720 IS produced shots that were reasonably crisp and detailed, with excellent automatic exposures and faithful colour reproduction. Noise was obtrusive in the darker areas of photos at ISO 800, but noise-reduction processing didn't sacrifice detail. The 1cm macro focus and the 6x stabilised zoom greatly enhance the camera's scope for composing interesting shots, but otherwise image quality is best described as reliable rather than exceptional. Samsung's similarly priced NV8 (see 'Also consider...' on the opposite page) offers significantly superior levels of detail, capturing subtle skin textures that the Canon simply glosses over. In terms of image noise, the A720's ISO 400 setting is roughly equivalent to the NV8's ISO 1600. Then again, the Canon's image stabilisation –

which the NV8 lacks – means that high ISO speeds are less often called for.

The A720 IS doesn't excel in any single area, except that it includes everything keen photographers need at a remarkable price. Casual snappers should go for the Samsung NV8 with its more compact design, superior image quality and slightly lower price, but for anyone with artistic aspirations, Canon's A720 IS is an unbeatable deal.

Ben Pitt

### SUMMARY

- ✓ Full manual control
- ✓ Low price
- ✗ Noisy at high ISO speeds

DIGITAL CAMERA 8.1 megapixels (3,264x2,448), 6x optical zoom (35-210mm), SDHC slot (16MB card supplied), 2x AA batteries  
PART CODE 2092B007AA  
DETAILS [www.canon.co.uk](http://www.canon.co.uk)

### PERFORMANCE (see page 58)



## Also consider...

### PENTAX Optio A30

★★★★★

£130 inc VAT

From [www.ebuyer.com](http://www.ebuyer.com)



The Optio A30 has a 10-megapixel sensor and an optically stabilised 3x zoom lens. It's possible to set the maximum ISO speed in the Auto ISO mode, and this helps to reduce noise. This camera is quick to focus and images have warm, vibrant colours. Portraits have natural skin tones and highlights are not clipped.



DIGITAL CAMERA 10.0 megapixels (3,648x2,736), 3x optical zoom (38-114mm), SDHC slot (22MB internal), 710mAh li-ion battery  
PART CODE 19215  
DETAILS [www.pentax.co.uk](http://www.pentax.co.uk)  
FULL REVIEW Dec 2007



### PANASONIC Lumix DMC-FX33

★★★★★

£158 inc VAT

From [www.ebuyer.com](http://www.ebuyer.com)

This exceptionally stylish ultra-compact camera is packed with enticing features, including a 3.6x zoom and optical image stabilisation. It has intelligent Auto, which ensures great shots in tricky conditions. Test shots outdoors were impressive, with excellent colours; indoors noise-reduction trampled detail. Even so, it's a great compact camera at a low price.



DIGITAL CAMERA 8.0 megapixels (3,264x2,448), 3.6x optical zoom (28-100mm), SDHC card slot (27MB internal), li-ion battery  
PART CODE DMC-FX33EB-S  
DETAILS [www.panasonic.co.uk](http://www.panasonic.co.uk)  
FULL REVIEW Feb 2008



SONY

## Cyber-shot DSC-T2

★★★★

£190 inc VAT

From [www.camerabox.co.uk](http://www.camerabox.co.uk)

Compact digital cameras have become increasingly multi-coloured over the past year, but metallic green sets a new standard for radical styling. Whether you go for green, pink or a more demure black, white or blue finish, the DSC-T2 looks gorgeous. The sliding lens cover doubles as a power switch and a bare minimum of buttons interrupt the camera's elegant curves.

All the camera's functions except shutter release, zoom and playback are accessed through the 2.7in touch screen. Some touch screens can slow a camera down, but this one is responsive and accurate, and the interface exploits it well. Key photographic controls line the edge of the screen, and adjusting them simply involves pressing them to call up a list of options. The spot focus point is set simply by touching the screen. Image stabilisation is built in to counteract camera shake, although its advantage is offset by the f/3.5 maximum aperture. This lets in less light than the lenses on other cameras, so longer shutter speeds are necessary more often.

The most startling feature is the 4GB of built-in memory – enough for 1,300 shots at maximum quality. This makes the card slot largely redundant, especially as it isn't possible to record directly to a memory card. Saved images can be copied to a card, though, and the memory

adds around £25 to the value of the camera. However, it appears that this memory is a performance bottleneck. Continuous shooting set off at an impressive 1.6 frames per second (fps) but fell to 0.9fps after just eight shots. Otherwise, performance is excellent, with extremely fast focusing times helping to achieve an average of 1.5 seconds between shots. Battery life is just about acceptable at 302 shots.

Face detection is almost ubiquitous in cameras these days, but the DSC-T2's implementation is one of the best we have seen. The camera tracks multiple faces quickly, resulting in excellent exposures when shooting against dark or bright backgrounds. However, face detection isn't nearly as exciting as smile detection. After selecting this scene preset and pressing the shutter button, the camera waits for your subject to smile before taking a picture. If you're shooting a group of people, you can touch the screen to determine which one the camera should keep an eye on. It recognised

only huge toothy grins and maniacal grimaces, and not subtler smiles, and there was a delay of anything up to a second, which may be too slow if you're trying to capture a smile from a reluctant subject. However, smile detection works well as an alternative to the self-timer function, and the novelty factor alone should ensure that you end up with lots of grinning mugshots.



It's great to see a premium compact camera that doesn't have a massive megapixel rating just for the sake of marketing. However, the DSC-T2's photos aren't as sharp as those from other 8-megapixel cameras. It appears that Sony uses some sophisticated digital sharpening to improve the perceived detail in shots of subjects without complex textures, but hair, skin and other textures reveal the camera's limitations. This is disappointing, because images are otherwise excellent. Photos were expertly exposed, with natural-looking white balance under artificial lighting. Low-light shots looked a little mottled due to struggling noise reduction, but ISO 1600 shots looked surprisingly smooth – albeit with an even greater loss of detail. High-contrast scenes were handled well, although clipped highlights tended to have a halo of yellow around them. Casual users are unlikely to spot most of these issues, but the lack of detail is harder to ignore.

Ultimately, the DSC-T2 is a camera for gadget lovers rather than photographers, but that's not necessarily a criticism. Models costing half as much offer better image quality, but the DSC-T2 is such fun to use that it still deserves its three-star rating.

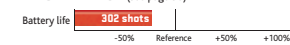
Ben Pitt

## SUMMARY

- ✓ Fun design
- ✓ Masses of internal storage
- ✗ Photos lack detail

DIGITAL CAMERA 8.1 megapixels (3,264x2,448), 3x optical zoom (38-114mm), Memory Stick Pro Duo slot (4GB internal), li-ion battery  
PART CODE DSCT2G.CEH  
DETAILS [www.sony.co.uk](http://www.sony.co.uk)

## PERFORMANCE (see page 58)

NIKON  
Coolpix P5100

★★★★★

£196 inc VAT

From [www.purelygadgets.co.uk](http://www.purelygadgets.co.uk)

The Coolpix P5100 has a hotshoe and threaded lens ring for attaching accessories, and its body looks smart and feels robust. It's slow, taking three seconds between shots, but its image quality is excellent. Colour reproduction reminded us of SLR cameras. It's a pleasure to use and has stunning image quality.



DIGITAL CAMERA 12.0 megapixels (4,000x3,000), 3.5x optical zoom (35-123mm), SDHC card slot (25MB internal), li-ion battery  
PART CODE VAA840B1  
DETAILS [www.nikon.co.uk](http://www.nikon.co.uk)  
FULL REVIEW Feb 2008

SAMSUNG  
NV8

★★★★★

£100 inc VAT

From [www.play.com](http://www.play.com)

**BEST BUY** Samsung's 19mm-thick NV8 is a superb compact camera. It has full manual control, although it lacks priority modes and manual focus. It's fast, though, with quick auto-focus and a great screen that lets you see when your subject is in focus. Shots are exquisite: they're sharp and reproduce fine textures faithfully. Noise isn't a problem thanks to the large sensor, and colours are accurate. At this new low price, it's a bargain.



DIGITAL CAMERA 8.0 megapixels (3,264x2,448), 3x optical zoom (34-102mm), SDHC slot (20MB internal), li-ion battery  
PART CODE 8801089435538  
DETAILS [www.samsungcamera.com/uk](http://www.samsungcamera.com/uk)  
FULL REVIEW Apr 2008

CANON  
PowerShot A570 IS

★★★★★

£104 inc VAT

From [www.bigcitydigital.co.uk](http://www.bigcitydigital.co.uk)

**BEST BUY** The A570 IS has a 4x optically stabilised zoom lens, which makes it great for counteracting camera shake, especially in low light. It also has face detection and full photographic control including aperture- and shutter-priority modes. Image quality is as good as we'd expect given the specifications and price.



DIGITAL CAMERA 7.1 megapixels (3,072x2,304), 4x optical zoom (35-140mm), SDHC slot (16MB card supplied), 2x AA batteries  
PART CODE 1773B008AA  
DETAILS [www.canon.co.uk](http://www.canon.co.uk)  
FULL REVIEW Nov 2007



### CASIO Exilim Zoom EX-Z1080

★★★★★

£140 inc VAT

From [www.play.com](http://www.play.com)



The EX-Z1080 isn't brimming with remarkable specifications, but it's this kind of camera that often turns out to be excellent value. It's a little chunkier than the Casio EX-S880 (reviewed in *Shopper* 242) but it has a bigger battery, a 10-megapixel sensor and is still highly compact.

The controls and menu are almost identical to the EX-S880's. There's the same collection of fun features such as face detection that shows favouritism for predefined faces, plus a daft Quick Shutter option that takes photos without focusing. Its USB port is of the slower Full Speed type, which transfers at just 0.89MB/s, so it's worth buying a card reader. Shooting performance is up to scratch at just over two seconds between shots. The 0.85fps continuous mode is disappointing, but a High Speed option takes 2-megapixel shots at 2.7fps.

We were impressed by the detailed skin textures shot in bright light at close range, with every pore, blotch and wrinkle captured with unnerving

precision. However, shots of more distant subjects were rarely as sharp, particularly at the edges of photos. Colours were vibrant, but face detection failed to produce pleasing exposures when shooting against a dark or bright background.

Noise levels are the hardest challenge for a camera with so many megapixels, but the EX-Z1080 performed admirably, with smooth results at ISO 400 and a usable ISO 800 setting. Noise was more

of a problem when shooting video in low light, as the H.264 format struggled to compress the noisy frames. Otherwise, video capture was superb, with a generous 848x480 widescreen resolution, smooth auto-exposure, a working optical zoom and high-quality audio.

The Z1080 doesn't quite equal Samsung's NV8 (see page 37) for image quality or performance, but it's close.

Ben Pitt

#### SUMMARY

- ✓ Mostly excellent image quality
- ✓ Exceptional video mode
- ✗ Inconsistent focus

DIGITAL CAMERA 10.0 megapixels (3,648x2,736), 3x optical zoom (38-114mm), SDHC slot (11B internal), li-ion battery

PART CODE EX-Z1080B

DETAILS [www.canon.co.uk](http://www.canon.co.uk)

#### PERFORMANCE (see page 58)

Battery life 478 shots

-50% Reference +50% +100%

### PENTAX Optio S10

★★★★★

£119 inc VAT

From [www.purelygadgets.co.uk](http://www.purelygadgets.co.uk)



The S10 is only a few millimetres smaller than most compact cameras but it looks tiny, as it's barely taller than its 2½in screen. Inside there's a 1/1.8in CCD, which has around twice the surface area of most compact cameras' 1/2.5in CCDs. This helps reduce noise, although the 10-megapixel sensor piles it back on again.

The controls are the same as those we've seen on Pentax point-and-shoot cameras for a number of years, but that's no bad thing. The menu system is straightforward and we particularly like the way any four photographic controls can be accessed via a customisable short-cut button. You can set the range of speeds available in Auto ISO mode, although when we selected 64-800, the camera never went above 400. Performance is excellent: 1.3 seconds between shots rises to 2.3 seconds with the flash. Continuous shooting is at 1.2fps until the card is full.

Photos were sharp and detailed, although no more so than from some 8-megapixel cameras. Some noise was visible even when shooting in

fairly bright conditions and at ISO 200. ISO 400 gave borderline-passable results but ISO 800 shots were messy and best saved for emergencies. ISO 1600 gave appalling results.

Colour accuracy was generally respectable, but colours were often a little undersaturated and high-contrast scenes tended to be slightly underexposed. The automatic white balance was erratic under artificial light, giving some photos a yellow tint, although the Tungsten white balance preset fixed this. Video is recorded in DivX format, which keeps files small, but videos looked messy and the automatic exposure lurched awkwardly in changing light.

None of these image-quality concerns is fatal, but together they take the shine off this otherwise desirable camera.

Ben Pitt

#### SUMMARY

- ✓ Ultracompact
- ✓ Fast performance
- ✗ Average image quality

DIGITAL CAMERA 10.0 megapixels (3,648x2,736), 3x optical zoom (38-114mm), SDHC slot (22B internal), li-ion battery

PART CODE 19345

DETAILS [www.pentax.co.uk](http://www.pentax.co.uk)

#### PERFORMANCE (see page 58)

Battery life 361 shots

-50% Reference +50% +100%

## CHOOSING A... Compact Digital Camera

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

RESOLUTION: 7.1 megapixels

ZOOM: 3x optical (35-105mm)

DISPLAY: 2.4in, 115,000-pixel LCD screen

SUPPLIED MEMORY: 10MB internal

BATTERIES: 2x AA disposable

Recommended minimum in grey

**1** A digital camera with the specifications shown in grey will suit those who want to take pictures to view on their PC and create 7x5in prints. It should cost around £80, but there may be hidden downsides such as slow performance and very basic user controls.

**2** Spend more and you'll get a higher resolution. A 10-megapixel sensor has the potential to produce sharp prints up to A3 size, but only if it and the lens are suitably high quality. There are 12-megapixel compact cameras available, but we've yet to see one that's significantly better than 10-megapixel models. Most people don't print enlargements so a 7-megapixel sensor is sufficient.

**3** A 3x zoom lens gives reasonable scope for framing your shots, but a larger range can do wonders for your photographic skills. Some compact cameras manage a 6x zoom while a few go as far as 10x. However, big zooms need optical image stabilisation to avoid blur at extreme settings. Alternatively, consider a wide-angle lens, denoted by a 28mm or lower minimum focal length.

**4** Big LCD screens are a treat to use but they don't always offer sharper detail. A 2½in screen is common even in the budget market, but only the best have resolutions of 200,000 or more pixels.

**5** Consider hidden costs: budget £20 for a 1GB memory card, as the bundled memory will never be enough. If your chosen camera doesn't have rechargeable batteries, budget an extra £15 to buy a set.

**6** Don't forget that specifications tell you very little about image quality; you'll need to read our reviews for that. In a compact camera, we believe that the user shouldn't have to grapple with complicated controls to get great images in all lighting conditions.